



**WILLIAMSBURG-JAMES CITY COUNTY
PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

Office of the Assistant Superintendent

MEMORANDUM

DATE: October 17, 2003

TO: Carol S. Beers
Superintendent

FROM: Jeffrey O. Smith
Assistant Superintendent for Academic Services

Regina Hervey
Director of Office of Accountability and Assessment

SUBJECT: Bright Beginnings Program Evaluation Summary

Attached is a copy of the Executive Summary for the Bright Beginnings Evaluation report. The School Board approved the evaluation of the Bright Beginnings program during the 2002-03 school year. The comprehensive report has been provided under separate cover.

For public review, a copy of the full report is available in the Office of Academic Services and in each of the elementary school libraries.

Bright Beginnings Program Evaluation Report

Executive Summary

Bright Beginnings is a prevention/early intervention program which serves children from three to five years of age. Children and families served by the program have identified risk factors known to impact school success. The Bright Beginnings program is modeled after the Perry Preschool Project, a nationally recognized program, which has demonstrated the value and cost-effectiveness of early intervention services for young children. The Perry Preschool Project is the focus of a thirty-year longitudinal study, conducted by the High/Scope Research Foundation, concluding that for every dollar invested in high quality early intervention services for young children there is a savings to the community in excess of seven dollars. Bright Beginnings has been serving children at-risk of school failure in Williamsburg-James City County since 1983.

Strong interagency collaboration generates many referrals to Bright Beginnings. Child Development Resources (CDR), the Comprehensive Health Investment Project (CHIP), Head Start, the Colonial Services Board, Olde Towne Medical Center, and the Child and Family Connection all generate referrals for services throughout the school year. While the program was originally developed to serve children who were referred for special education services but were found ineligible, current identification of students reveals many children from non-English speaking families, children who have extremely challenging behaviors, children with medical issues, and children whose families are facing an array of ongoing social and emotional stressors.

All of the following elements are integrated within a high quality preschool setting to optimize student growth and development:

- extensive monthly schedule of parent involvement opportunities
- monthly home visits by the classroom teacher and others who work with the child
- on-site services of a school nurse, social worker, and other support staff
- accessible community resources for family counseling, adult education, or medical consultation and follow-up

There are a total of eleven Bright Beginnings classrooms located in four elementary schools across the division: James River, Rawls Byrd, Norge, and Stonehouse. Most children are served in half-day programs (four hours per day), but there are two full-day classes (six hours per day) – one at James River and one at Rawls Byrd. The full-day classrooms receive a limited amount of funds through the Virginia Preschool Initiative grant. Additionally, a small amount of funding is provided through the Title V grant. Each classroom has a full-time teacher and an instructional assistant. All teachers are highly qualified professionals, holding a degree in early childhood education or early childhood special education. Eight of eleven hold a master's degree in their field of practice.

How Bright Beginnings was Evaluated

The Bright Beginnings program was designated for review during the 2002-03 review cycle. Since January of 2003, the program evaluation has met to plan, review, and implement the evaluation of Bright Beginnings. During the evaluation process, the team reviewed literature, developed research questions and performance criteria for the proposal, conducted interviews, designed surveys, reviewed collected data, and made recommendations and commendations for the Bright Beginnings program. The purpose of the evaluation was to examine the following:

- Implementation of the Bright Beginnings program compared to recommendations in educational literature
- Standards and qualifications of the staff
- Students served
- Success of the Bright Beginnings program as measured by achievement data
- Annual cost of Bright Beginnings
- Overall level of satisfaction with the program

The Impact of Preschool Programs

Q. What does research say about the impact of preschool programs on academic performance?

A. Academic Performance

Research generally concludes that formalized early childhood education programs have a positive impact on young children based on the understanding that programs are high quality and a one or two year program cannot immunize children over the long-term against poor academic outcomes. Furthermore, research on high quality early childhood programs supports reduced special education placements and fewer grade retentions.

- Test results of former Bright Beginnings students show strong academic performance in grades K-3.
 - 80% of former Bright Beginnings students scored the same as other grade 3 students on the SOL tests in Reading and Mathematics (See Graphs 5 and 6)
 - Based on 2002-03 data, 83% of former Bright Beginnings students were reading on or above grade level by the end of the year (See Table 3)

- Data collected on ninety former Bright Beginnings students attending first grade during the 2001-2002 school year revealed: (Sharpe Database)
 - 3 students received special education services
 - 2 students were retained
 - 13 students received Reading Recovery services

Q. What does research say about the impact of preschool programs on qualified teachers?

A. Qualified Teachers

Educational literature recommends that early childhood education teachers be qualified, that qualifications include formal post-secondary training in areas such as child development, and that early childhood teachers be well-compensated.

- All eleven Bright Beginnings preschool teachers are fully licensed
- Nine of the eleven Bright Beginnings teachers have master's degrees
- 90% have 5 or more years of experience in early education.
- Compensation for preschool teachers is based on the same salary scale as all other teachers in WJCC with a mean salary of \$43,308 per year.

Q. What does research say about the impact of preschool programs on class size?

A. Class Size

The research overwhelmingly supports small class size. Jones (1998), reports that the consensus among thirty-eight studies suggests a class size of fifteen with a licensed teacher and a trained teacher assistant.

- A review of Bright Beginning records for April 2003 indicated that class size did not exceed 16 students for any class
- Student/Adult ratios for 2002-03 varied and ranged from a 7:1 ratio to a 10:1 ratio due to the mobility of the student population

Q. What does research say about the impact of preschool programs on health and safety?

A. Health and Safety

Health and safety issues typically address transportation, facilities, and meals. It is generally agreed that preschool children should not travel with older children on regular buses. Safety standards proposed in the state of Virginia would require another staff member in addition to the bus driver when sixteen or more children are transported together.

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) recommends at least 35 square feet of usable play space indoors per child and 75 square feet of play space outdoors. In addition, NAEYC recommends a separate play area for younger children.

Good nutrition is vitally important for children of all ages and especially important in the development of young children. Since young children need to eat more often than older children, snack time is an important part of the daily schedule (Porch, 2002).

- Separate transportation is provided for the Bright Beginnings students and each bus has another staff member in addition to the bus driver.
- Three year-olds have car seats and four-year-olds have seatbelts.
- Each of the four preschool sites has a separate play area for the Bright Beginnings students.
- The school lunch menu is reviewed regularly and amended by the school nurse to ensure that food does not pose any choking hazards for young children.
- The school lunch program meets the requirements established by the federal government for the National School lunch and breakfast program.

Q. What does research say about the impact of preschool programs and parental involvement?

A. Parental Involvement

A vital factor in quality preschool programs is the level of active parent involvement and is a strong indicator of overall success in school. Researchers suggest that parents spend time at the preschool site and recommend home visits particularly for half-day programs.

- 53% of parents responding to the survey reported that they are involved in the Bright Beginnings program on a monthly basis and 24% reported that they are involved on a weekly basis (See Appendix B)
- A review of monthly parent participation options indicated a sufficient number of options were offered and included flexibility to accommodate parents' schedules for participation.

A. Curriculum

It is generally agreed that no one approach or single curriculum is best (Porch, 2002). However, what is generally accepted is a body of principles that result in appropriate learning experiences for young children. The curriculum should provide learning experiences that are hands-on, activity-oriented recognizing that preschoolers are “constructing meaning” from their environment (Smith, 2003). The curriculum should be structured, but recognize the intricate relationship between both learning and play. In addition, curriculum standards should include cognitive, social, and emotional growth.

- All Bright Beginnings classrooms follow the Creative Curriculum which is based on the High/Scope Preschool Model.
- Observation of classrooms revealed many centers that provided numerous hands-on, activity-oriented learning experiences for children.
- Teachers reported that they followed a specific schedule of activities that provided students with a sense of routine and structure.

Commendations from the Evaluation

- Strong leadership from Early Childhood Education Coordinator (ECEC)
 - Bright Beginnings teacher interviews and survey comments highlighted strong leadership from the Early Childhood Education Coordinator, Renee Dino.
- Strong sense of commitment and dedication on the part of the Bright Beginnings teachers and staff to their students
 - Based on the teachers’ interview, classroom observations, and responses on the surveys, all committee members were impressed with the level of enthusiasm, commitment, and concern teachers expressed regarding the Bright Beginning program.
- Strong academic performance of former Bright Beginnings students in grades K-3
 - Achievement on Grade 3 SOL test results in reading and mathematics was equivalent to other third grade students
 - Few retentions
 - Few special education referrals
 - Few Reading Recovery referrals
- Limited English Proficient students receive priority attention for placement in Bright Beginnings
 - Limited English Proficient students make up approximately 7% of all Bright Beginnings referrals and are generally placed first.

- Selection process involves multiple sources of input (Renee Dino and the intake social worker along with Bright Beginnings teachers have input on the final classroom placement)
 - In an interview with the coordinator, it was noted that the selection process contains input from multiple sources. The coordinator and social worker conduct the intake and Bright Beginnings teachers give input on final classroom placement based on the intake list.
- Collaboration with other community agencies to coordinate services and resources for Bright Beginnings preschool classes
 - An interview with Renee Dino revealed the background and evolution of the Bright Beginnings preschool program and the coordination of the community resources.

Recommendations from the Evaluation

- Determine additional intervention services needed for former Bright Beginnings students in grades 4 and beyond based on longitudinal data compiled and in the report by Dr. Thomas J. Ward.
- Standardize instructional time for half-day classrooms
 - The team noted an inconsistency in the total time for each ½ day classroom. Comments on parent surveys also indicated that the inconsistency among the hours between the classrooms was an issue, especially when children were moved from one classroom to another. The team recommends that the ½ day schedule be standardized to include the same amount of instructional time for each ½ day class.
- Standardize teacher assistant classroom assignments
 - All classrooms except for two at Rawls Byrd have full-time assistants. Part-time assistants work during the time period that the children are in class; however, their work schedule does not extend into the time Bright Beginnings teachers complete planning for future lessons and home visits.
 - It is recommended that teacher assistant classroom assignments be standardized across all classrooms.
- More collaboration contact between Bright Beginnings teachers and elementary school teachers to facilitate better transition for Bright Beginnings students
 - Bright Beginnings teachers indicated in their interviews and survey comments that they would like more opportunities to collaborate with Kindergarten teachers about a Bright Beginnings student's transition to Kindergarten.

- Kindergarten teachers also indicated in survey comments that Kindergarten transition could be improved through more collaboration between Bright Beginnings teachers and Kindergarten school teachers
 - Educational literature says that the pre-school teacher/Kindergarten teacher collaboration is essential for the success of the program and for student achievement.
- More training for Bright Beginnings teachers in general special education strategies and behavior management techniques
 - Because of increasing numbers of students with special needs in their classrooms, Bright Beginnings teachers indicated a need for more specified training in general special education strategies and behavior management techniques. With better strategies for dealing with problem behavior, teachers can utilize effective behavior management techniques and devote more time and energy to instruction.
- More accountability for parent participation
 - Parent participation logs are contained in each child's file. It is recommended that parent participation records be compiled twice a year (mid and end-of -year) and monitored for compliance with the parent participation agreement.